

# Gonorrhea Fact Sheet

HIV/STD Program, Bureau of Health, Maine Department of Human Services

## What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea (gon-or-REE-ya) is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by bacteria called gonococcus. Gonorrhea can infect the cervix and vagina, the penis, the rectum, or sometimes the throat. Gonorrhea is easily treated with a single dose of medication.

## How common is gonorrhea?

Here in Maine, gonorrhea infections are rapidly increasing. Maine is experiencing a gonorrhea epidemic. **Many new infections are occurring in men who have sex with men.**

## How can I get gonorrhea?

You can get gonorrhea by having oral, anal or vaginal sex. Gonorrhea can also be passed from mother to child during birth.

Having gonorrhea once does not protect you from getting gonorrhea again. You can get infected again if you have sex with someone who has gonorrhea.

## Am I at risk for gonorrhea?

If you have sex, you can get gonorrhea. You are at risk for getting gonorrhea if you have unprotected sex—even once. If you have more than one partner, or your partner has other sexual partners, you may even be more at risk of getting gonorrhea.

## How do I know if I have gonorrhea?

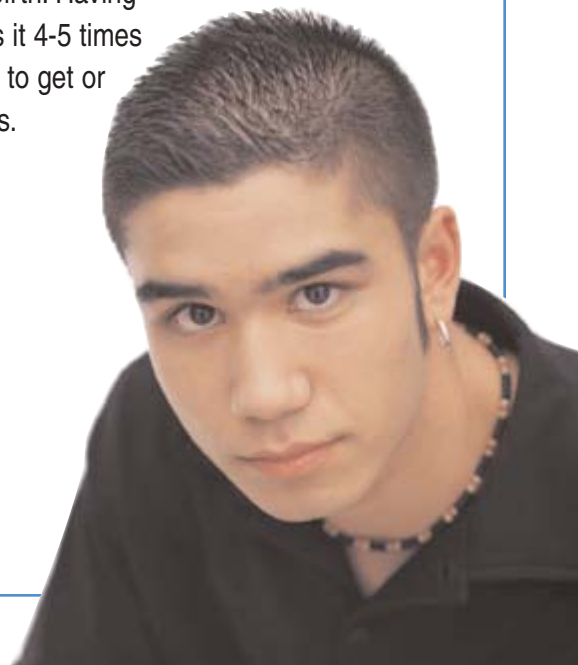
Men who have gonorrhea may feel burning while peeing or have a thick yellowish fluid coming out of their penis. Women may have a yellowish or bloody fluid coming out of their vagina. They may also feel some burning while peeing.

If you have gonorrhea in the rectum, you may notice a fluid coming from the rectum, or have anal itching, soreness, bleeding, and sometimes painful bowel movements. Gonorrhea in the throat does not cause many symptoms.

## Is gonorrhea serious?

If gonorrhea is not treated early, it can lead to long-term health problems in both women and men. Gonorrhea can spread into the reproductive system. Men may develop painful swelling of the testicles. Women can develop long-lasting pain called “pelvic inflammatory disease” (PID). PID may make a woman unable to have babies. Gonorrhea can also be passed from a mother to her child during birth. Having gonorrhea makes it 4-5 times more likely either to get or give HIV to others.

**Having gonorrhea makes it easier to get infected  
with HIV or to spread HIV to others.**



Sometimes, gonorrhea can spread through your blood and infect the joints, heart valves, and even the brain. It can also cause arthritis, skin problems and other organ infections.

### How is gonorrhea diagnosed?

Doctors or other health care workers will do a test for gonorrhea. Usually, this means taking a swab from the penis in men, from the cervix in women (during a pelvic exam), and often from the rectum—and sometimes from the throat.

### How is gonorrhea treated?

Gonorrhea is usually treated with a single dose of medication. Treatment usually can be given by mouth, but sometimes an injection is needed. Often, people who have gonorrhea have chlamydia too. If you have gonorrhea, you may get treated for chlamydia at the same time. It is important to take all of the medication given to you, even if the symptoms stop before all the medication is gone. Although medication will stop the infection, it will not fix any permanent damage done by the disease.

### How can I protect myself against gonorrhea?

Use a latex condom correctly every time you have sex. A condom put on the penis before starting sex and worn until the penis is withdrawn can help protect you and your partner. Condoms do not provide complete protection from STDs. Washing the penis or vagina, peeing, or douching after sex **does not** prevent STDs, including gonorrhea.

If you think you have gonorrhea, avoid having sex and see a health care provider immediately. If you are diagnosed with gonorrhea or any other STD, you should tell all of your recent sex partners so that they can see a health care provider and be treated.

Do not have sex until both you and your partner(s) have completed treatment.

### Where can I get more information?



- **Ask your health care provider**
- **Maine Bureau of Health:**  
Phone: 287-2046  
[www.MainePublicHealth.org/STD](http://www.MainePublicHealth.org/STD)
- **Call your local health clinic:**  
Bangor: 947-0700  
Auburn: 795-4019  
Portland: 756-8067
- **Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Website:**  
[www.cdc.gov/std](http://www.cdc.gov/std)
- **CDC National STD Hotline:**  
(800) 227-8922 or  
(800) 342-2437  
  
En Español (800) 344-7432  
  
TTY for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (800) 243-7889